

# The Falcon Flies Again

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Summary: After the events of Vector Primeâ€¦ A long time ago, in the galaxy far, far awayâ€¦ A new evil is rising. Hard to find, and hard to see, it shrouds itself in myths and pain. Few who have seen it at work live to tellâ€¦and a hero of the Rebellion and the R

## The Falcon Flies Again

> <meta name="Generator"> The Falcon Flies Again: 1-7 of \*\*\_

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WARNING, SPOILER: If you don't know yet what SUPPOSEDLY "happens" in "Vector Prime" read with caution; a large, important part is revealed.

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**\*\*AUTHOR'S NOTE:\*\*** This story is dedicated to Chewbacca the Wookieeâ€¦who should \_not\_ have suffered as he did at the hands of R. A. Salvatore! (By the way, Mr. Salvatore, I sincerely apologize, I'm \_sure\_ you're a real nice guy.) May Chewbacca \_never\_ \_rest\_ in peaceâ€¦because he shall live forever!

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## CHAPTER ONE

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Chewie slowly opened his eyes. Then shut them abruptly. "Arrorowwroogh," he moaned. His furry head felt like someone had just shoved it inside the \_Falcon\_'s engine and taken off. In factâ€¦Life-debt or no life-debt, Anakin Solo would be \_very\_ sorry about this. Not even a Jedi-trainee could do this to Chewie for practiceâ€¦at least, they couldn't with \_two\_ armsâ€¦

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Chewbacca was right. Anakin \_was\_ very sorry. Not for cramming Chewie in the engine to shut him up while the boy tinkered with the Falcon, but for not being able to get the Wookiee off-planet in time. And Anakin would never get the chance to apologize, either. Chewie, Han Solo's best friend, a hero of the Rebellion, the greatest uncle a kid could have, and idol of Kashyakk, was dead. Killed. Suicided. Murdered. However you said it, nothing changed.

Anakin felt like going to get a lightsaber, sticking it in his mouth, and thumbing the trigger. Somehow, though, he had the idea it wouldn't work. Dad would think he was running away, mom would be ready to kill dad, Jaina and Jacen would be really sad and angry, too and his Uncle Luke would probably find a way to stop him from doing it at all. \_Maybe a blaster would work better\_ But how would I get the blaster?

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Han Solo had gone a little farther than his son. He actually had the blaster by his ear, was pulling the trigger, then flinched and dropped it. "C'mon, pal, be a sport!" Han's voice trailed off. There \_was\_ no pal to pull the blaster away and give him a kick big enough to throw him through the bulkhead. There was no pal, \_period\_. Right now, Han didn't give a Sith that Anakin felt like scum. He didn't worry about his other two kids, his wife, or all his friends. All he thought about was Chewie. The big buddy who was no more. Han grabbed for his blaster and successfully rammed his head into the top of his bunk.

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\_Man\_, he thought, \_this must be hitting me bad. I haven't hit that since I got the thing. "I know, I know, Chewie, but I was drunk then!" Han irritably ran a hand over his wet cheeks. "I gotta stop talkin' to him. That'll just make it worse. "Ha! What a clown I am! That won't make it worse! 'make it worse' ha! Nothin' c'n make this worse, 'cause there ain't nothin' t' get worse!" Han didn't notice his speech slurring. Had he, the captain of the \_Millennium Falcon\_ would never have attributed it to the fact that eight bottles of hard Corellian brandy lay strewn about his bunk.

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Chewbacca peeked carefully out of one eye. It was still bright, but it no longer hurt to open his eyes, at least. Chewie could say

nothing about the rest of him, of course, but at least he could see again. "Arror grra krran?" he asked.

"Ah, Master Chew Bacca. How good to see you awake." Obviously, whoever this was didn't know his name, if he pronounced it in two. Chewie was about to clear things up when his jaws clicked shut abruptly. The figure had just stepped into Chewie's line of vision.

"Mrrrrrrnâ€|" Chewie moaned, even though he could see no face, that voice and smell were more than enough to tell Chewie who he was addressing.

And it wasn't good. Not at all.

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In the Imperial Palace on Coruscant, Princess Leia Organa-Solo, Chief-of-State of the New Republic, struggled to catch her breath.

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\_What's wrong with me\_, she thought. It's as if there's a black cloth over my headâ€| But I feel danger, tooâ€| Suddenly, enlightenment struck. It's the Force!

The Force is trying to tell me somethingâ€|something's wrongâ€|and somebody's in danger!

But why would the Force tell \_her\_ something? She had the Force, yes, but she was no Jedi! Why didn't Luke notice? He'd be able to figure it out. Her brother was a Master Jedi; he'd know right away what it meant!

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In the Jedi Temple of Yavin IV, Luke Skywalker, Jedi Master and Rebellion hero, was having a nightmare.

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\_No, \_Luke told himself\_, not a nightmareâ€|"a premonition!\_

— —

"Through the Force, many things you will see. Other places, old friends long gone," Yoda had told him. Luke remembered his first such vision; one which had almost resulted in disaster at Bespin. Hopefully he'd handle this one a lot better. Luke sighed and surrendered himself to the Force.

Dangerâ€|that was the prominent sense Luke got. Nothing was very clear, but he knew one of his close friends was in danger, or soon would be. He stretched out his feelings, probing, but could make out no face. It was as if a cloud of darkness surrounded him, trapping him in, suffocating himâ€|\_Get a grip\_, Luke told himself. Now that was odd; he hadn't felt that way since Vader hadâ€"Vader? Could that be it? Noâ€|this wasn't about Vader, or any Sithâ€|it was a friend. Luke \_knew \_it was a friend.

Maybe if I try to pick the person, then see if it fits? That had never been tried before to Luke's knowledge, but then, thanks to the Empire, that knowledge was limited indeed. Oh, well, couldn't hurt to do that.

Luke stretched out his feelings, searching. Mara? Was itâ€"no, it wasn't Maraâ€|Leia, then? Was his sister in any trouble? No, neither were the twinsâ€|Anakinâ€|he sensed a faint foreboding about Anakin, but not thisâ€|Hanâ€|Han was very troubled, but somehow Luke thought that was different. That was about Chewbaccaâ€"Chewbacca? Now why did \_that \_name seem to fit? Chewie was deadâ€|Luke quickly stifled his grief before he lost the vision. He tried it again; no, it was definitely Chewbacca! That didn't make sense! A vision from the past, perhaps. But then the dark veiling didn't make sense, because it had already happened. Chewbacca was \_already \_deadâ€"already dead! That was it; a \_veil\_ didn't cloud this; it was covered in a \_shroud\_ of darkness!

Chewbacca's \_death\_ \_shroud\_!

Luke sat up in bed, drenched in sweat. Chewbacca's death shroudâ€|Beside him Mara awoke.

"Luke, what's wrong? What's the matter?"

"Maraâ€|. " His voice was hoarse, it rasped in his throat. It was a struggle just to breathe through the suffocating shroud. Luke gasped in a breath before continuing urgently: "Mara, it's Chewbaccaâ€|\_he's not dead\_!"

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## CHAPTER TWO

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"What?" Mara laid a hand on her husband's arm comfortingly. "Luke, what are you talking about? I know it's really sad, but didn't you already accept this? Isn't \_Han \_the one who's still dealing withâ€" "

"No, Mara. Trust me; the Force just told me that he's \_not dead.\_"

Mara Jade-Skywalker, Jedi, former personal assassin for the Emperor, wife of Luke Skywalker, Rebel Commander, didn't think much could shock her any longer. But then, she never claimed to be omnipotent. Because she'd just been given a surprise big enough to knock her to the Outer Rim and back.

"\_What?!\_" Mara started open mouthed at Luke. "Are you telling me

that all this has been for \_nothing\_, because the Wookiee didn't die?"

"I neverâ€"well, actuallyâ€"yes. I'm telling you just that."

"Then you'd better hope you're wrong."

"Why do you say \_that\_?" Luke asked in surprise, "don't you \_want\_ Chewbacca to live?"

"No. Because if all this Sithspawned pain was for nothing, \_I'm going to kill him!"

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"Open your eyes, Chew Bacca. I know that you are awake." The voice was relentless, insistent. It gave him no rest. Slowly, reluctantly, Chewbacca braced himself to do as it bid.

"Good, goodâ€"I see that our friend here did not hurt you too badly in getting you away from thatâ€"er, tight spot."

Didn't hurt too badly? If this wasn't too bad, Chewie would \_hate\_ to see what this \_moron\_ claimed was painful!

"Arroooowâ€" Chewie moaned quietly.

"I know, I know. You're mad at me, I'm sure. But really you shouldn't be! Don't you realize that if I hadn't seen fit toâ€"uh, remove you, you would still be there, floating in space, forgotten by all your so-called friends."

Would he never shut-up? "Rrrerrownphrrâ€" he growled threateningly.

"Now, really, you don't think I haven't already taken precautions against that? I doubt you could muster the strength to do anything in your condition, but I \_have\_ \_prepared\_ for contingencies."

A very bad situation just got worse. A \_lot\_ \_worse.

Boba Fett stalked into Chewie's frame of view. So \_that\_ \_was\_ what he'd smelled. A \_ratâ€" a stinking bounty rat! Chewbacca managed to raise his head and growl as much to Fettâ€"along with a few other choice words and expletives rather colorfully describing Fett's ancestry, personal habits, and bounty hunting skills.

With no result at all. \_Could\_ \_nothing\_ shake this scum's calm? I just gave him enough to make \_Lando\_ blush, and he didn't even twitch a muscle! Arrgh! I'd like to rip his arms off and throw him across the galaxyâ€" |

Fett tuned and looked right into Chewbacca's eyes, as if he could see exactly what the Wookiee was thinking. His head slowly shook once, from side to side, warning Chewie not to even think about itâ€" |

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The peaceful silence of a jungle evening on Yavin IV was broken by a series of small splashes as a rock skipped across the surface of the river. Another followed it. Jacen Solo sat staring gloomily into the muddy water, intent on it. He absently hurled stones across the surface of the water. His thoughts were darker than the fast-approaching twilight made the river water appear to be; they focused entirely on his adopted "uncle" Chewbacca—the late Chewbacca, which was the entire problem. Chewie was dead and Jacen's thoughts could find no other path to follow but the same one traveled by the rest of his family; one of gloom, pain, and sorrow.

Tenel Ka Chume Djo, Jedi, Dathomirian warrior, and Haplean princess watched her friend sorrowfully. The Wookiee's death had saddened her as well, but she was no stranger to loss, nor had she been exceptionally close to Chewbacca in his life. She knew her friends Jacen and Jaina were feeling a lot of pain over Chewbacca's death, however, and respected that. She had left them to their feelings at first, knowing that they wished to be alone and feeling they would come forward when they felt themselves ready, and she respected that. But the twins had not come forward, nor had they appeared to deal with their loss on their own, and as Tenel Ka well knew, sometimes you did not know what was best for yourself in a time of pain and grief. She decided it was time to step in and do what she could to help.

The young warrior girl walked forward and sat next to Jacen on the riverbank. He stared into the waters and did not seem to realize she was there. She sat still for a moment more, then gently touched his arm. Jacen started but did not look away from the river.

"Jacen," she spoke softly, "my friend." Jacen blinked but did not answer so she continued, "Jacen—" Tenel Ka knew that no mere words of comfort could help her friend in his grief, and for a moment did not know what to say. Then she realized what she could do. "Tell me a joke, please."

He turned and stared at her for a moment, then tears filled his eyes. "Oh, Tenel Ka—I can't—I'm just—" the dam burst and tears rolled down his face. Tenel Ka put her one arm around him, trying to comfort her friend as best she could.

In a little while his tears were gone and he sniffled. "Thank you," he whispered.

"No my friend," she replied, "thank you—for coming back to us."

The two young Jedi Knights sat close together on the bank of the river for some time after that, just watching the sun set over the tops of the tall jungle trees on Yavin IV.

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On Coruscant, the comm's insistent buzzing finally woke Leia from her doze. "Whatâ€"Chewie, can you shut that thingâ€" \_Oh. Sith. He's \_dead\_â€"|\_

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Leia reached out a hand and swatted it. "What?" not the most diplomatic greeting, no, but Leia was in no mood to be diplomatic right now.

"Uh, Chief-of-Stateâ€" "

"Whatever it is, it can and \_will\_ \_wait\_. Thank you."

"Butâ€"Chief-of-State! Madame President! It's a shipâ€"they refuse to transmit codes of clearance, despite hails, and are on course to your private docking area!"

> "Then stop them. I <em>really <em>don't have time for this."

"Butâ€"Madame Presidentâ€"the ship matches the \_Millennium Falcon\_ perfectlyâ€"which is another reason we're worried, if you get what I mean, ma'am."

Han's modifications. Of course. What better way to sneak in a ship loaded with weapons than to camouflage it as the \_Falcon\_, almost-impossible as that was? Stillâ€"|Leia stretched-out with the Force.

"Don't worry, it's Han, just let him land. He probably forgot to transmit the codesâ€"| \_because Chewbacca always does that\_, Leia finished silently.

"Uh, of course Madame President. Right away!" the comm tech signed off, and Leia slowly reached-up to turn off her own comm.

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Glanath. Cold, dark world. Secret. Hidden deep within the Outer Rim. A perfect hiding place for evil.

For a Dark Jedi.

The \_Slave VII\_ dropped in for a landing on this uninhabited worldâ€"|and suddenly there was life. Not just life, but \_technology\_. Fett's comm came alive with a buzz of static transmission. He abruptly cut it off, and spoke into the secondary one.

"Ras Alvtorr. I told you not to do that."

"Oh, well, I'm sure if you \_are\_ Boba Fett, that bounty hunter I have

working for me, that you've \_asked \_me not to do that, butâ€"

Fett cut off the Dark Jedi answering him. "I am Boba Fett. I told you never to do that. Damage this ship and it will be unhealthy."

"But," he whined, "you \_know\_ how secret this must be, why, should those pitiful fools, those usurpers, those selfish, greedy New Republic people, should those puny idiots find out, then all would beâ€"

Again, Fett cut him off. "Save you speeches," he sneered, "I'm not interested in your politics."

"You should be! Everyone should be! Why, if the whole, entire galaxy was, those slimy New Republic characters would never have gotten their chance to stealâ€"

"Shut-up."

Alvtorr huffed in offense, and would have spoken out in indignation, but Fett was quicker:

"You said you had another bounty. One on a Solo. I'm here to talk."

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"Sith!"

"Huh? What's \_wrong\_?" Mara had never heard Luke take that tone of voice before, let alone with that kind of word.

"The comm's \_busy\_, now! \_Before\_, she wouldn't \_answer\_! \_Now\_, I can't get \_through\_!"

"Well, try again later. Who are you trying to get, anyway?" Mara wondered.

"Leia! Or Han! To tell them about Chewie!"

"You mean you \_still \_didn't get to them?" she asked incredulously.

"No!"

"Sith!"

"Exactly!"

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When, five standard hours later, they \_still \_hadn't gotten through,



the two decided it was time for another course of action.

"Mara, I think you should go to Coruscant and tell them personally."

"Why don't you come? She'd believe you much faster; Leia believes almost anything you tell her, if you say it had something to do with the Force."

"She'll believe you, too. I'm going to look for Chewie. I think I can find him."

> "Well, than I'm coming with you! You'll need help, Skywalker."<p>

"Mara, don't argue! Some one needs to make sure \_Han \_of \_all people\_ knows!"

"Then we'll leave him a message on his comm. He can call us in the ship." Luke knew better than to try and dissuade Mara from any course of action when she wore that look. Still, he couldn't help but try.

A little later, Luke had just proved it was impossible again.

"You listen to me, Luke Skywalker! Baby or no baby, I'm definitely going along to help you!"

"Baby? What baby?"

"Oh, Sith."

"Mara, what are you talking about? Did you sayâ€\_baby?\_"

"Fnarling big mouth. ...Yes, I said baby. I'm pregnant, Luke."

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An hour later, the \_Jade's Saber \_lifted off from Yavin IV with two passengers, destination: unknown.

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### CHAPTER THREE

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Jaina Solo sat hunched over her workbench in the Jedi Temple, holding a hydrospaner in her hands when her brother entered the room.

"Jaina! You'lllâ€Jaina? Are you okay? What's the matter?" Jacen laid a hand on his twin sister's shoulder. "C'mon, Jaya, tell me?"

Jaina turned her tear-streaked face towards her brother. "Oh, Jacen," she sobbed, "do you see this?" She held the hydrospaner up for him to see.

"Yeahâ€¦it's a hydrospaner. But what's wrong, Jaya? Tell me, please."

"Thisâ€¦Chewie gave me thisâ€¦for my birthdayâ€¦and later I told him it was out-of-dateâ€¦" Jaina cried harder. "It's the best tool I ever gotâ€¦and now I'll never be able to tell him that." Jacen wrapped an arm around his twin sister as she sobbed loudly.

Brother and sister sat, crying for the uncle they had loved and lost, pouring out their grief to each other, and were comforted together.

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It wasn't so for their younger brother.

He didn't seek such comfort. He wasn't worthy of itâ€¦

Anakin Solo stood staring at the lights of the city-planet. Coruscant, named for the beautiful Corusca gem, because her lights shone so. Anakin wasn't looking at the lights.

Anakin was looking at the darks.

His mood was black, hurt, angry. Although he didn't know it, he stood dangerously close to the doors of the Dark Side. Had he known, would he have cared?

"Why?" he spoke aloud to the empty night, "why?" Although Coruscant was teeming with life and solitude was hard to find, Anakin was all alone. Aloof, cut-off from all others, friends and family alike in his grief. Aloneâ€¦

"Why did he have to die?" Anakin's face was streaked with tears, but his eyes were no longer damp.

"Why did Chewie have to die? Why did they kill him?" Raised as a Jedi, he tried to find the reason within the Force, yet he was not calm enough to attune himself to it. "Why did the Force allow it?" his thoughts turned even darker, more hateful. "Why did the Force kill him?"

Finally, he released his pent-up feelings, screaming: "I hate the Force! If it could kill Chewie, why couldn't it have killed me? Without Chewie, nobody would even notice if I died! All they'd see was Chewieâ€¦'cause I'm the one that killed himâ€¦" His eyes suddenly filled with hatred and desolation. "And 'cause I'm nobody. I'm not even my own person!" Although Anakin had fought these inner demons many years before and triumphed, with the Dark Side they returned.

"I'm just Anakin Solo, the second one! I'm Darth Vader's namesake, that's why nobody cares about me! They hate me 'cause they hated himâ€¦"and now I'm just like him!

"I've killed someoneâ€"no, not just someone; I've killed Chewbacca! Nooooâ€"|" Anakin fell to his knees, howling his grief and anger to the cold, unhearing skies.

Although he didn't know it, he stood dangerously close to the doors of the Dark Side.

Too closeâ€"Much too close.

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\_Boba Fett stood near the door\_â€"that was the first thing Chewbacca saw when he woke again. \_Well, \_he thought, that \_just ruined a morningâ€"if it is morning.\_

But then, he remembered, Han had said that any time you wake-up is \_technically \_morningâ€"Hanâ€"Chewie missed Hanâ€"He couldn't stop himself from letting out a quiet moan of grief which Fett heard.

The bounty hunter's head whipped towards Chewie, his \*\*T\*\*-shaped visor glaring at him. Fearless as Chewbacca was, a small chill ran up his back at the sight.

"What do \_you \_want? " Chewie growled threateningly at Fett in Wookiee-speak. The bounty hunter made no answer, so Chewie started to speak again.

"Shut-up."

Chewbacca was so taken aback that he did as Fett had said and his jaws clicked shut. Rapidly.

But not for long; Chewie growled at the bounty hunter to leaveâ€"in far more \_colorful \_terms, of course. Fett didn't move a muscle. Chewbacca was getting madder and madderâ€"and as his anger rose, strength returned to his limbs. It was only then that Chewie found he was in far less pain than the last time he'd awoken. He inquired of the air how long it had been since he'd last awoke. As he was expecting no answer, when one came it surprised him:

"Five Standard Weeks. Now quiet."

—

Five Standard Weeks? And how long before that? And how much longer will it be before I can escape, or Han can find me?

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Chewie knew his friend was optimistic, but could Han keep searching for him forever? No! But \_then \_what? What would Chewbacca be able to do without Han?

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Chewie didn't know it, but Han was thinking the same things. What could \_he \_do without \_Chewie\_? Chewie was more than a copilot, was more than a partner, Chewie was a \_friend\_. Not just a friend, but \_Chewbacca\_!

How could Han even live without his buddy? It was just impossible! Was there even \_life \_without his pal? Right about now, Han really didn't think so. If Chewie was deadâ€"which Han \_still \_found hard to acceptâ€"why should he even bother to stay alive?

Again, Han reached for the blaster in his holsterâ€"and came up with empty air. "Sithspawn!" Han remembered; he'd left his blaster by the door of the shipâ€"which he refused to leave. The \_Falcon \_might be sitting in the docking bay on Coruscant, but so was Han Solo! This was where his best memories of his buddy were, so this was where he was gonna stay!

Had Han only checked his comm, he would have found the message left by Luke and Mara. But Han wasn't in the mood to check the comm.

Had he only, had he only! Then, perhaps, he might have seen the message Leia left him as wellâ€"The message about his son, Anakinâ€"

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Anakin Solo had gone to Yavin IV to talk to his uncle. It had been a struggle, yes, but he was finally on his way.

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\_Why should he even want to talk to \_me\_, \_Anakin had thought. "Why me?" he'd shouted, "I'm the second Darth Vader!" Anakin didn't know how close he was to the truth right then.

The Dark Side had been close on his heels ever since Chewbacca had died, but never closer than when he prepared to talk to his uncle and Jedi Master.

Had he gone sooner, things may have been avoided. But he didn't. He waited, and then they were gone.

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Anakin's shuttle had touched down over Yavin. "Where's Master Skywalker," he had asked of the nearest students, but all they could tell him was "not here," and "he left with Mara" or other such comments. In his present mood, this wasn't a welcome fact.

"But I have to talk to him!" he'd cry. Then the students would counsel "patience." Anakin was \_sick \_of patience! Did patience save Chewbacca? No; it got him killed! Anakin was in no mood for patienceâ€”the Dark Side was riding hard on his heels.

Too hard. Much too hard.

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"Hey, watch itâ€”whoa!" Anakin looked up just in time to get a face full of falling datapads. A student had been levitating them into the Temple when Anakin had walked right through it.

"What do you think you're doing?" Anakin shouted at the young Rodian.

"I am sorry; you wall-walkk-walked into my field of th-thou-thought and I am not yet an ad-adept at levi-levi-levi-whatsis." The Rodian struggled with his Basic, half-forgotten in excitement and nerves.

"Sorry, Sithspawn! You little \_idiot\_, what were you \_thinking\_? If you can't \_do \_it, don't \_do it\_!" he shouted back, threateningly stepping towards the Rodian.

"Me-my-I am sorry! I meant no to do that-this-it!" the alien stuttered.

"Hey, kid! Lay-off, he was just practicing." "It was an accident, don't get so uptight!" "What kind of a Jedi are you, anyway?" students called to him from around the Temple.

"Yeah, sure! Take \_his \_side! It doesn't matter, it was only \_me\_! I'm \_nothing\_, just a \_repeat\_! And I'm a \_Vader\_, too! Don't worry about \_me\_! Well, Sith you! Sith you all!" Anakin twirled on his heel and stormed off in a dark tide of anger. In the Dark Side.

"Whoa, chill-out buddyâ€”"

"Chill-out! Chill-out!" Anakin shouted shrilly. When the Twi'lekki student laid a calming hand on his arm, Anakin lost it. "I'll show you chill-out!"

With the Force, Anakin grabbed the Twi'lekki and threw him across the clearing into the river. The other students flinched, then started forward towards him.

"Anakinâ€”" Tahiri called, but in his rage he didn't hear her.

"I'll show you \_all\_! I'll be somebody, just you wait! I'll be more than somebody, I'll be \_me\_!" Raising the Force, Anakin threw a wave of Force-energy outwards. Jedi students tumbled across the jungle and flew away from him.

Anakin Solo, grandson of Darth Vader, stalked away across the landing area, vibrating with the Forceâ€”with the Dark Side of the

Force.

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\_What a rush\_, Anakin thought as he flew off from Yavin IV. \_That was  
\_so \_cool! I've never done such a good job using the Force before!  
That was just \_so awesome\_! \_

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Anakin had just fallen, for a moment, to the Dark Side. He could have  
still been pulled back easily, had anyone been there. Had his uncle,  
his father, his mother, his sister or brother, Chewbacca...had any of  
them been there, he might never have fallen, and if he had, would  
have quickly been saved. But none of them was there.

And no one pulled him back from the Dark Side.

—

\_That was just the neatest thingâ€\_Anakin had enjoyed himself with  
the Dark Side, and he would continue to do so. \_The next Darth Vader  
indeed! I'm not Vader, I'm \_me!

Anakin didn't know how wrong he was when he said thatâ€|how deadly  
wrong he wasâ€| About the Dark Sideâ€|

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Leia raised her head from her desk tiredly to the insistent beeping  
of the comm. \_Not againâ€| \_

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"What? This is Chief-of-State Leia Organa-Solo. Can I help youâ€""  
she asked.

"Organa-Solo!" a distraught young Mon Calamari cried.

"Umâ€|yes, that's meâ€|is something wrâ€""

"Everything's wrong!"

"Uhâ€|can you elaborate, please?"

"Oh, sorry! I'm a new student at the Jedi Temple, and it's about your  
son!" The Calamari looked about to burst into tears.

"My son? Jacen and Jaina are still at the academy, but theyâ€"" Leia  
was confused.

"No, it's Anakin! He-he'sâ€"" the young girl started crying

violently.

Leia was getting very worried now. "What about Anakin? It's all right, don't worry, just tell me what's wrong."

"Okay, here goesâ€|"

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Leia slowly turned off the comm and sat back in her chair. \_Anakin, fallen to the Dark Side? \_she wondered in shock.

It couldn't be! It just couldn't be! Anakin?â€|\_how\_? Leia sat, stunned, in her chair, not noticing the beautiful sunset over Coruscant for the tears filling her eyesâ€|

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#### CHAPTER FOUR

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"Lukeâ€|" Mara Jade-Skywalker sat in the seat of the \_Jade's Saber\_, staring out the viewport into hyperspace.

Luke stirred from a nap in the co-pilot's seat. "What's wrong, Mara?"

"I was hoping you could tell me," she said dryly.

"Ohâ€|" Luke finally opened his eyes the whole way. "Why?"

"I don't knowâ€|but I have a bad feeling about thisâ€|"

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Leia opened her eyes, and immediately wondered what had awakened herâ€|Until she felt a blaster pressed against her skull.

Suddenly, she was wide-awake. Before she had even begun to concentrate on the Force to pull the blaster away and throw it across the room, she realized how futile that would be.

Her assailant spoke. It was a harshly accented, emotionless, cold voice. One that she recognized with a shiver of fearâ€|

It was Boba Fett.

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In a moment of unreasoning reaction, Leia grabbed the heavy, ornate glowrod off the nightstand with the Force and flung it at Fett's helmeted head in a gamble of hope.

It failed. Miserably.

Fett ducked and the glowrod flew past him. Before it could shatter on the wall and alert Winter in the next room, Fett shot with his silent assassination-blaster. It wasn't a very high-powered one, but it worked very well where silence was essential. Like now.

While the bounty hunter's back was turned, Leia managed to yank the lightsaber from beneath her pillow and thrust it into the pocket of the pants she'd fallen asleep in. It only took her a second, which was good, because it took Fett no longer to obliterate the glowrod.

Before the princess could do anything more, the bounty hunter had whipped back around and pointed his blaster at her again. On an impulse, Leia gave it a twist with the Force and leaped aside—"right into the dart Fett shot.

The bounty hunter hadn't wasted any blasts on the knocked-askew blaster, but instead had anticipated where Leia would leap to and fired a Mandalorian dart at her. Leia only had time to gasp once before the neurotic dart took effect and she slowly slipped to the floor and into blackness...

Fett walked over and caught her before she hit the floor. Slinging the Chief-of-State over his shoulder like a sack of nerf-meat, the bounty hunter walked to the window he had skillfully and silently opened to enter.

The \_Slave VII \_flew off into the dark night.

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Suddenly, the \_Jade's Saber\_ was \_yanked \_violently out of hyperspace. Luke, who wasn't strapped in to his seat, went flying across the cockpit and \_slammed \_into the bulkhead with a thud. Mara's head flopped dangerously close to the control panel cut her crash restraints held.

"Luke! Are you—"oomph—"alright?"

"â€|yeahâ€|fineâ€|" Luke gasped, struggling for his breath, "whatâ€|happ'nd?" Luke struggled back into his seat, grabbing the crash restraints and securely tucking them around his body.

"We gotâ€|Sithspawn!â€|knocked out of hyperspaceâ€|by the planet right \_there\_!" Mara replied frantically, trying to stop their descent.

The \_Jade's Saber\_, engines off-line from the abrupt transition to



normal space, plummeted helplessly toward the planet slowly filling the viewportsâ€|

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Lowbacca the Wookiee stared out at the looming gas giant of Yavin. He was in the highest treetop he could find, but it wasn't high enough to lift him over his grief. At his belt, the miniaturized translating droid Em Teedee was silent, switched off so Lowie could have his solitude.

Alone in the jungle, Lowie took no notice of the teeming wildlife around him. He was isolated from his friends and family here, where nobody could find him. He crooned low in his throat expressing his feelings, but trying to keep them inside, trying to be a brave Jedi Knight.

It wasn't working.

Suddenly the branches beneath him rustled loudly, startling him from his reverie. He yelped in surprise when something touched his back and spun around, ready to fight whatever attacker that was there. He chuffed with relief when he saw it was his friend, Tenel Ka, a Dathomirian warrior and Hapean princess. In his leafy perch, she was one of the few who could follow him.

"Greetings Friend Lowbacca."

Lowie growled back, somewhat embarrassed at being so easily startled and unalert, but Tenel Ka seemed not to have noticed. Lowie crooned a question.

"Jacen, Jaina, Zekk and I are worried about you, Friend Lowbacca. The twins were too consumed in their grief to notice before, but we realize you should not have to be alone. If you would come down, our friends have accompanied me to look for you, although they would find it much harder to follow you up here. I found it hard enough!" she spoke in an acknowledgment of his Wookiee climbing abilities, trying to distract him from his pain. Lowie was grateful to the warrior girl for doing so in a manner that would not hurt his pride, and touched her one arm in recognition, then followed his friend to the ground.

"Hi Lowie," Jacen was standing with his sister and Zekk beneath the tree-trunk.

Lowbacca growled back a greeting in Wookieespeak. As soon as he swung his lanky form to the ground, the twins rushed over to hug him and Zekk followed more self-consciously to stand beside him. Lowie wrapped his long shaggy arms around the Solo twins and hugged them tightly, knowing they had been as close to his Uncle Chewbacca as he himself was.

"We're sorry," Jaina's voice was muffled from being buried in Wookiee fur, "sorry that we didn't realize it hurt you as much as it hurt us."

"Yeah," Jacen added, "but there's no reason you have to be alone. We weren't."

"Sharing grief makes it easier to bear," Tenel Ka said and placed her hand on Lowie's shoulder. Zekk walked over to the group and spoke as well.

The five young Jedi Trainees clung to each other in grief; sharing it and helping their friends deal with the pain of losing Chewbacca, comforting themselves and their friends.

In their grief, they were stronger together, could deal with it better together. With their friends.

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Leia awoke with a pounding headache. The princess moaned and shook her head to clear it—once, before she realized that made it hurt worse. She groaned again.

"Here. Drink." A small metal cup was thrust into her line of vision—held by a hand gloved in Mandalorian armor. Leia pressed her lips together tightly in mute defiance as her vision swam sickeningly.

"It will eliminate the afterimages of the drug."

Leia wasn't even \_about \_to trust the bounty hunter! He'd already proved more than enough times what scum he was, and she \_certainly \_wouldn't believe anything \_he \_said.

"Fine." Instead of trying to force the Chief-of-State to drink the liquid, Fett set it down within the bars of her cell and turned to go. Finally Leia allowed her curiosity to get the best of her.

"Where—" Leia swallowed, trying to moisten her throat enough to talk. She tried again, "where are you taking me?" she croaked.

"That is no longer any of your concern."

"But," she tried a different tactic, "why did you capture me? I don't have any bounty on me."

"That is also irrelevant."

—

\_Was he \_always\_ so close-mouthed?\_ Leia wondered in dismay. \_I won't be able to get a \_thing \_out of him. \_The bounty hunter returned to the cockpit of his ship, leaving Leia with only one small scrap of information.

"Brace yourself."

That might mean that they would be leaving hyperspace soonâ€¦ Leia fervently hoped so. The \_Slave VII \_might suit a bounty hunter's wants well enough, but the cage was far from luxurious, and Leia still had that headache which made it very hard to thinkâ€”or see. \_Maybe\_â€¦ she thought. No, it has to be druggedâ€¦ but why? If he wants to kill me or knock me out again, he doesn't need to do it with a drug. One of those darts or some other weapon would work just as wellâ€¦ Maybe it really \_is \_to clear up the drugâ€¦

Before common sense could stop her, Leia reached out and grasped the cup, gasping at the dizziness such a small movement caused. She drained it in one gulp and felt some of her headache vanish. It still hurt, but at least she could think better now. And it was a lot easier to move! \_That will help when I escapeâ€¦\_ the thought trailed off. \_Escape? How? \_She didn't even know what she was escaping \_from\_!

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Alone in the cockpit of the \_Millennium Falcon\_, Han Solo stared out the viewport. He had landed the \_Falcon \_on Coruscant two days ago, but he hadn't left. He wondered why he'd come. At the time he programmed in the hyperspace coordinates, he'd had reasons. He'd see Leia, maybe they'd go to Yavin IV to see the twinsâ€¦ but it didn't matter any more. Now he just sat, staring at the hanger bay walls, wondering why he was here.

It crystallized then. He didn't \_want \_to be here. This brought it all back to him; Chewie should have been here too. This was where they'd been, all of them, before they leftâ€¦ and then Chewie never came back. It was too hard to stay here.

Without realizing he'd made a conscious decision, Han lit the repulsor lifts and, without bothering to ask for clearance, he'd flown out of the hanger bay, not even realizing until he was out in the air above Coruscant.

Alone in the cockpit that should have held two, Han, solo again, flew off into cold, dark, empty spaceâ€¦

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## CHAPTER FIVE

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"Are you telling meâ€¦ that you just walked in there and grabbed their pitiful Chief-of-State and \_no one stopped you\_?"

"Yes."

"But-but-butâ€”but it didn't take long enough! And nobody noticed yet! And what about Solo? Why didn't he do something? Noâ€”I \_told \_you \_not \_to kill him, Boba Fett! Youâ€”"

"Solo is undamaged. He was not there."

"But-but-butâ€"but then that means he won't \_know\_ we have her! Take her backâ€"no, wait, don't! I want you toâ€" "

"Listen, Alvtorr. I bring in bounties \_my way\_ and nobody is going to tell me how to do so. Understood?" Fett's cold, emotional voice was more frightening than any show of emotion would have been. Ras Alvtorr cringed beside the comm screen.

"Yes. Yes, of course, Boba Fett. I understand \_perfectly\_. Please, I was under a false impression. I understand absolutely perfectly! Is thereâ€"anything I can do toâ€"help?"

"Yes. Shut-up."

"Oh. Iâ€"see." Alvtorr shrunk down inside his billowing red robes as if to hide from the masked hunter's vibroblade-like glare.

"Open the shield and drop your cloaking. I'm coming in. I have the Princess with me." Without so much as a "talk to you soon" Fett abruptly disconnected. Alvtorr didn't know whether to be thankful or insulted.

He choose to decide which later and hurried to do as the hunter askedâ€"he refused to think that \_anyone\_ could order \_him\_ around, let alone a mere bounty hunterâ€"even if he \_was\_ \_the best bounty hunter; it didn't matter.

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Boba Fett's ship, the \_Slave VII\_ docked at the hidden base on the moon of Glanath, home of Ras Alvtorr. He stalked down the ladder to the holding area in his ship where the princess was imprisoned.

Without a word he unlocked the cage door and grabbed her arm. She struggled for a moment, commanding him to release her. Fett ignored her labors and dragged his merchandise out the hatch and into Ras Alvtorr's domain. He had been there for the past month, "guarding" the slimy Dark Jedi from the Wookiee Chewbacca.

It was all very annoyingâ€"just like Alvtorr. The Dark Jedi came scurrying up to Fett's side, inquiring, dithering, and generally being an idiot.

Fett cut him off before he could start to repeat himself. "You shall pay me for Organa-Solo now."

"Oh, of course, of course! Yes, yes, let me just get the creditsâ€" Alvtorr dug in his billowing robes trying to locate the pocket his money was in, keeping up a steady monologue all the while.

Finally Ras Alvtorr located the money and handed Fett the fifty thousand credits for the capture of Leia Organa-Solo. Fett took it

without a word and tucked the credits into a pouch on his Mandalorian armor. Alvtorr continued babbling to Leia:

"Yes your highness, oh I'm sure you'll like it here, princess. Don't worry, we only have one other guest, and I think you'd like him, but no, no, we shan't show him to you, no, no. Ah, princess, you don't know me, do you? No, none of you do, not yet! But you will, oh you will! For I, I am Ras Alvtorr, and I shall destroy you're puny government, destroy it! I amâ€"

"You are an idiot," Leia cut him off, "if you think just because you can get Boba Fett to snatch me, you can destroy the New Republic. You can't. If you kill me they'll just elect a new leaderâ€"we're a democracy, and we have justice on our side. You cannot win, because you cannot kill hope. We are hope, and hope will never die." Alvtorr stood gapping at Leia, shocked into silence. Fett stood, silent, waiting rather patiently, as Alvtorr's mouth opened and shut a few times, making him resemble a snot-nosed hooker-fish even more than he did usually.

Finally, the self-styled Dark Jedi found words to counter the Princess form Alderaan. "You may say that you have whatever you wish on your side; I have the Dark Side and your hope will die, Chief-of-State, it will it will it will!" Alvtorr stamped his foot much the way children did when throwing temper tantrums. Fett stood motionless, used as he was too ignoring such childish displays of temper. The princess looked about to speak again, but shut her mouth abruptly when Alvtorr yanked a metal cylinder with buttons on it from the folds of his robeâ€"not without some consternation to locate and detach it. "See?" he asked, "see, see, see, see? I have a lightsaberâ€"so there!" Alvtorr's bottom lip jutted out in a pout. The princess's hand twitched towards her pocket in instinctivelyâ€"she didn't even seem to notice the unconscious reaction, but the bounty hunter did. And he knew its significance, which Alvtorr would have been unable to deduct even had he seen.

Boba Fett knew it meant she had her lightsaber, as well.

But he wasn't about to tell his employer.

Fett might have been in Alvtorr's retention, but he had his own agenda. One that was not identical in the least to Ras Alvtorr'sâ€|

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"I am sorry, unidentified ship, but until you give us your identification, you will not be allowed to land."

"Oh, I will be."

Traffic control replied as it had done before, "I'm sorry, but you will not be allowed to landâ€"

"You will let me land."

> "Youâ€|willâ€|beâ€|allowedâ€|toâ€|landâ€|" <p>

"You are sorry for taking up my time."

"Iâ€|am sorryâ€|forâ€|takingâ€|upâ€|yourâ€|timeâ€|"

"Move  
along."

"Moveâ€|alongâ€|moveâ€|alongâ€|Thankâ€|youâ€|sirâ€|"

Anakin Solo had been trained in the use of the Force by his uncle, the Jedi Master Luke Skywalker. He had been taught to use the Light Side, and not to bend minds. ]

He had decided, shortly after Chewie's death, that his uncle had no idea what he was talking about. If he had, wouldn't he have been able to save Chewie? Besides, nobody cared about himâ€"why should they?â€"so they wouldn't bother to worry if they were teaching him right, would they? There was no point in it! He was nothing more than a repeatâ€"Darth Vader two!

"NO!!" he shouted against his thoughts, "I'm not going to be another Vader! I'm going to be meâ€"me!! I'll be somebodyâ€"somebody important!! I will!!" Anakin pounded his fist into the control panel so hard sparks flew. He lights flickered and the engines died. Muttering about faulty manufacturing, Anakin didn't bother to climb down into the engine and tinkerâ€"one of his favorite things to doâ€"but instead concentrated on his anger, building his strength with the Force, and fixed the ship. The engines roared back to life, the lights flared brilliantlyâ€"and the whole thing shorted out.

With sparks flying from his eyes and electrical discharges flickering around him, Anakin bent the Force, forcing it to do his willâ€"unlike the Light Side, where you went with the Force, rather than against itâ€"and the ship screamed painfully back to life. With ice blue eyes still flashing and blue lighting crackling around his body, Anakin sat back down in the pilot seat and roared down towards the planet. The comm crackled back to life, with the controller yelling at him to slow down. The young Solo boy snarled at him, sending out with the Force, and the controller convulsed in pain, then dipping down into unconsciousness, then falling suspiciously silent. Anakin didn't careâ€"he wasn't shouting at him any more, so it was all right.

Everything was all right now; he could do anything! The Force was finally with himâ€"finally really with him!

It never occurred to the boy that it might not be the right side that was with himâ€|

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Mara Jade frantically punched buttons, trying to locate the planet on any of the charts, hoping that she could figure out what she could do

to get them out of this system without crashing into any other uncharted planets.

It didn't help when Luke started to laugh convulsively.

"What's so darn \_funny\_?" she asked in annoyance.

"I'm sorry Mara," he replied, in between gasps of mirth, "it's just that this is \_Dagobah\_."

"And?" Mara's voice tightened threateningly.

"And? And what?" Oh, I'm sorry"

"You will be."

"it's just that I did just about the same thing the first time I got here. This is where Yoda lived."

"Yoda? Oh, that little green guy with the attitude and the speech defect?"

"Uh, yes. I'm not sure if he would have liked that description, but yeah, that's him"

"And the attitude, right?" Mara interrupted.

"Um yeah."

"Well that midget-Jedi needs to get his stupid planet on the charts! I just about plowed up his nose!" Mara replied.

"Uh, he's dead, Mara." Luke reminded her gently.

"I know"and a good thing, too!"

"What?"why?" Luke asked sharply?

"'Cause that way he's not around for me to chew out! I think he'd like \_that \_even \_less\_."

Luke convulsed with mirth again. Mara held out for a moment, then joined her husband in the release of tension. The cockpit filled with the sound of laughter, a sound heard all too little in other parts of the galaxy.

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Like here.

Han halfheartedly entered more hyperspace coordinates. He couldn't fly the \_Falcon \_half as well alone, but as long as he didn't run into any attackers, he'd get by. He'd been just popping in and out of hyperspace, drifting around. It wasn't a good way to leave a forwarding address, but since Han didn't want to be found it worked out perfectly. \_Almost\_ Something was missing that had been

missing. It would \_always\_ be missingâ€|his pal, Chewbacca.

Han missed the big Wookiee more than he'd ever missed anybody in his entire life. It was different when his kids were off at Yavin IV, there they were just a comm call away. It was different when they'd been kidnapped, then, he hadn't let himself believe there might be chance they wouldn't be okay. He'd been too busy trying to find them to \_miss\_ them as much.

Now, everything was different.

Not just different, it was \_wrong\_. The \_Falcon\_ was wrong, Han's life was wrong, Sith, the whole fnarling \_galaxy\_ was wrong!

And there was nothing Han could do to change it.

Nothingâ€|

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## CHAPTER SIX

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In the end, there was only one choice. Leia knew it, and had known it. But that didn't mean she'd accept it. The bounty hunter had thrown her into a small room and turned on the force field, that Dark Jedi jeering all the way. Fett had stalked away then, and had told him that he was going to "watch the other one" which meant Leia was not alone. Whether she could use that knowledge to her advantage, though, she didn't know. She'd finally gotten a name for the Dark Jedi, though. When Fett had left he'd called him "Alvtorr" so Leia assumed it was \_some\_ sort of designation of name. It at least made it easier to think about himâ€"now she could think at a \_name\_ rather than just at a \_him\_.

Leia knew that when Fett was nearby she'd stand little to no chance of escapingâ€"alive, anyway. No matter if she had the Force and a lightsaber, she wasn't good enough with either of them to fight \_him\_. For all she might detest the bounty hunter, she did have to admit that he was very good at what he specialized in; the capture and killing of \_anything\_ and \_everything\_.

She didn't know this Alvtorr's abilities yet, so she couldn't very well figure out how good she'd do against himâ€"still, if she was going to second-guess it, she'd bet on herself over him. For all his preening and posturing, she didn't think he was very good with the Forceâ€"or that ugly-looking black lightsaber he'd thrust under her nose earlier.

Besides, she could still hope that he'd leave soonâ€|maybeâ€|

Leia was shifting positions, trying to get more comfortable, when she heard a lovely sound.

The Dark Jedi was \_snoring\_. He'd dozed off sitting there watching her! Now, if she could just cut her way outâ€|

Leia peered around both with her eyes and with the Force, trying to see if anyoneâ€"Fett or somebody she hadn't seen yetâ€"was around,



but she couldn't get very far past that disconcerting "buzz" emanating from Alvtorr. \_That was oddâ€|I don't think any other Dark Jedi gave that offâ€|but then again, who am \_I \_to know? \_Anyway, there were more important things to think of right nowâ€"like getting out of here! Let \_Luke \_worry about those things \_after \_I escape to tell him!

The Chief-of-State didn't \_think \_anybody was right nearbyâ€|so she might as well risk it! She might never get a better chance; she'd have to tryâ€"no, she shouldn't \_try\_, she'd have to \_do\_â€|

\* \* \*

After some work, Leia had managed to cut a circle into the wall, and was waiting for the edges to cool enough that she could squirm through, when a small sound made her jump. She caught her balance and whirled around, looking for the source of the distraction.

It was Alvtorrâ€"she had the feeling that if she stayed around much longer, she'd find him \_very \_annoyingâ€"he had stirred in his sleep, apparently smelling the melted/burned metal she'd cut through. It wasn't much, but it was enough to convince her it was time to go, hot metal or not!

Leia had just clambered through when she got a tingle along the back of her neck. \_Oh\_, she thought, \_if only I'd had enough time to become a Jedi! Then I might be able to tellâ€|is that the Force, or just a static discharge from cutting my way out with a lightsaber?

—

— —

The princess decided it didn't matter; she'd have to risk it, whether it was or not.

Leia crept past the sleeping figure of Alvtorr as quickly as she could without making any noise. \_Well, \_she though ruefully, \_at least I don't have to worry about taking off any bootsâ€"Boba Fett didn't give me time to put any on! \_

— —

In her bare feet, Leia cautiously tiptoed down the silent, ringing halls. \_Oh\_â€|she thought, \_I hope I can find my way back to that docking bayâ€|I know the \_Slaveâ€"whatever number it is nowâ€"was there, and I think there was another ship, too. \_Leia didn't think she could fly the bounty hunter's ship, but something was better than nothing.

She was just relaxing, thinking she'd gotten past the point of danger, when she leaped nearly out of her skin.

"Where are you going, Princess Leia?" a harsh, accented voice grated from behind her.

Leia twirled and, still off-balance, grabbed for her lightsaber, but only ended up with a handful of hair, still down loose from the sleep Fett had interrupted earlier. She'd gasped to see the hunter standing casuallyâ€"well, as casually as Fett ever stoodâ€"directly behind her. Leia looked quickly at the blank walls of the hall. Either Fett

had been following her for a while"which she doubted, with those heavy boots of his"or else he'd come from a hidden panel built into the side of the wall, one that opened and shut soundlessly"which she doubted even more. She realized her hand was still groping for her pocket, trying to get the lightsaber"a dead giveaway she had one. She snatched it away quickly before she realized that was even more of a giveaway. Well, if he tries to take it, she thought disparagingly, I'll just have to fight him|\_she gulped.

The bounty hunter stalked forward threateningly. Leia tensed, ready to spring. Fett didn't grab for the blaster in his belt, but instead lifted an empty hand. Leia prepared to dodge a fist, but the bounty hunter grabbed her shoulder and roughly marched her back down the hall. It seemed to take a much shorter time heading back, because she hadn't had a chance to figure out how to get away before they were back at the cell"with two notable differences. One, Alvtorr wasn't there, and two, the cell wall was intact.

She flashed a questioning look around, but no answers were forthcoming. Either|\_Leia didn't think they'd managed to fix the wall perfectly in that time, so that would mean it was a new cell"so why wasn't Alvtorr there waiting to babble and criticize her? Unless|\_but that would mean that the bounty hunter was working against Alvtorr? I thought he was his employer"the Chief-of-State was very confused now. Fett tossed her into the cell and slammed the door. Leia caught herself and turned to watch the sequence Fett keyed in to bring up the force field, but the bounty hunter's hand flew over the keypad too fast for her to figure it out.

Fett turned his menacing visage to stare directly into Leia's eyes. She stood taller, determined not to look away. The bounty hunter spoke in his harsh, cold voice:

"I would not advise trying that again. It will not go so well for you."

Fett turned and left before Leia could speak, but he returned shortly, and unceremoniously dumped the still-sleeping Alvtorr into a chair just the way he'd been sitting at Leia's first cell. The princess was even more confused now! Wouldn't this mean that Fett was keeping Alvtorr from knowing she'd managed to escape? Maybe he just didn't want his employer to know he hadn't been able to stop her? Yes, that must be it. Maybe she could get the bounty hunter in trouble?"but that would mean the Dark Jedi would know what she'd managed to do.

Fett stared at her for a long, tense moment before stalking away.

It wasn't until later that the slightly dazed princess realized that Boba Fett hadn't taken her lightsaber away from her.

\* \* \*

Chewbacca, now in a more restraining and less medication-orientated quarters, knew something had changed. He sniffed as deeply as possible. He knew there was something he was missing"but he couldn't quite put a finger on it. Chewie squeezed his blue eyes shut beneath their dark whorls of fur, concentrating.

He smelled scorched ozone. Not the type from a blaster shot, but a smell he recognized nonetheless. And another, fainter, more elusive scentâ€¦He knew that scent wellâ€¦Oh, he \_almost\_ \_had\_ \_itâ€¦and then a smell he could easily place. Chewie groaned to himself. It was that stinking bounty rat. Again.

Chewie growled at Fett to get lostâ€¦with a few \_other\_ words mixed in, of course. It \_was\_ \_Boba Fett\_, after all.

Fett just scanned the instruments showing the state of the security systems and such. Chewie grumbled to himself, sniffed, and turned awayâ€¦and that's when it hit him. The scent he'd been trying to place hung a little on Fett's armor. Not enough for a human to tell, but Wookiee noses were much more sensitive.

Chewie whirled around, roaring at the bounty hunter, Wookiee battle-rage pumping through his veins. Where? He roared in Wookieespeak, threatening the hunter with a thousand horrible fates if he didn't tell him where Chief-of-State Princess Leia Organa-Solo was \_right now\_.

\* \* \*

Fett looked up from the instruments at Chewbacca's roar of rage. Immediately, the bounty hunter knew what was wrong, even before the Wookiee had said anything. He cursed himself for a fool. It was ludicrous not to have assumed that enough of the Chief-of-State's scent would have hung about his armor that Chewbacca, who had spent so much time in her company, would have been able to recognize it. \_He probably smelled the lightsaber, too. \_

--

Boba Fett thought fast; fast even for him, and decided what to tell the Wookiee. Chewbacca already knew that the Fett had recently been in the presence of Organa-Solo, he most likely knew that a lightsaber had been usedâ€”best to assume he didâ€”so there truly weren't all that many pertinent facts the Wookiee didn't already know that he would want too in order to see that he stayed quiet.

Chewbacca was just building himself up to another full-blown Wookiee roar when Fett's cold, emotionless voice cut in. At first the bounty hunter couldn't even hear himself over the bellowing Wookiee, but then Chewbacca realized he was actually getting answers and quietedâ€”temporarily.

"â€”is unharmed. Imprisoned elsewhere. Another bounty. That is all you need to know; you shall be silent now."

Chewie immediately roared as loud as he could. Fett stood unmoved; he'd heard \_louder\_ from far more \_vicious\_ creatures.

"That is all you shall be informed of." Fett's emotionless voice was final, unwavering, leaving no room for debate.

He walked out of the room to a concert of banging, thuds, roars, and growls, carefully re-shutting the soundproof door behind him.

\* \* \*

Late in the night, with nothing but stars to light the dark jungles of Yavin IV, Jacen Solo paced the roof of the Jedi Temple. Something was bothering him but he wasn't sure what it was. Dressed in a brown jumpsuit but with sleep-tousled hair and unshorn feet he looked as if just risen from his bed. Which he was. Sleep was hard to find and when it did come strange dreams troubled him—dreams that, once he woke up from, he could never \_quite\_ remember what they were. All that remained was a faint undercurrent of unease—and a glimpse—“nothing more”—of a woman with long hair that hid her face, and one of a silent laser-blast that disintegrated a glowstick. Jacen turned at the sound of bare feet padding on stone.

His twin sister, Jaina Solo, shuffled up the stairs and out onto the roof next to him. She rubbed sleep out of her eyes and yawned.

"Do you feel the same thing I do?"

Although Jacen was anxious he was a born humorist and couldn't resist the opportunity to tease his sister. "I dunno," he replied with a grin, "what do you think I am—a mind-reading Jedi or something?"

Jaina gave him a scathing look. "That wouldn't even make \_Chew\_—uh, \_Lowie\_ laugh." Jaina quickly covered her slip and glanced to see if her brother had heard. She guessed he hadn't noticed because he was giving his best "insulted/affronted/I'd-sulk-now-but-I'm-too-good-to" look.

"It would \_too\_. Lowie has a good sense of humor!"

"That's why he wouldn't laugh!" Jaina also couldn't resist teasing her brother but she was glad he'd succeeded in lightening her mood. "Seriously, though—" she began.

"—I feel uneasy," finished Jacen.

"Yeah—and my dreams—" she started.

"—are really weird but I can never remember them," completed her brother.

"So, in answer to my question—"

"—I do feel the same thing you do."

Jaina shivered, although the night was warm. Suddenly, the two twins stiffened and whipped their heads to look at each other. Their eyes met and they simultaneously turned and raced towards the steps—

—only to screech to a halt as Tenel Ka sprinted up them.

"Tenel Ka! Did you—" Jacen began only to be cut-off by the young warrior girl from Dathomir.

"Friends Jacen and Jaina! Your mother—they called—they are not sure but I doubt—it is important—" she exclaimed incoherently to the twins.

"Whatâ€" "

"Did youâ€" "

"Pleaseâ€" "

"How comeâ€" "

"When wasâ€" "

"Who's not sureâ€" "

The three babbled excitedly, drowning out the other's words.

"\_Twee-eeet!\_" a loud whistle rang out silencing the young Jedi. "Yo, guys! Shut-up. Nobody can hear anything." Zekk called from the stairwell door, just catching up to the faster Tenel Ka. "now," he continued, "how about Tenel Ka and I start by explaining, and \_then\_ you can interrogate us, okay?"

Jaina laughed weakly and went to stand by the tall, dark haired young man. "Good idea, Zekk," she said, leaning her head on his shoulder.

"One thing. Can we sit down? After racing after Tenel Ka through the entire Jedi Templeâ€"sheesh! How do you run so \_fast\_?" Zekk laughed as he and Jaina slid to the floor and leaned against the wall.

"Shall I start?" Tenel Ka asked.

"Go ahead, " Zekk replied, "you were there the whole time, not me."

"Very well." Tenel Ka and Jacen sat also before she continued. "We received a priority-override message from Coruscant. Theyâ€" "

"Mom and Dad? Are theyâ€" " Jaina began, before Zekk shushed her:

"She'll tell you if you let her."

Tenel Ka resumed her narrative: "They did not know where the Chief-of-State was."

"Oh \_no\_. "

"However they do have some suspicionsâ€" " The Hapean princess hesitated.

"About?â€" " Jaina prompted.

"What was it, Tenel Ka?" Jacen asked. Zekk looked uncomfortable.

"It appears as if someone just walked inâ€" \_through \_the balcony doorsâ€" "

"Ouch," Jacen said. \_Those balcony doors are \_really\_ strong with

\_major\_ good security systemsâ€|\_ he thought.

"â€and \_apparently\_ blew-up a glowstick \_silently\_ \_withâ€they believeâ€a muted assassin's blaster, then picked up your mother and walker out, got in a ship and flew awayâ€sometime last night."

"And nobody \_noticed\_? What about \_Winter\_? Last \_night\_?" the twins asked incredulously.

"This is a factâ€|apparently. Although Jedi Tionne did not suggest thisâ€"

"Like she had time to suggest \_anything\_ before you sprinted out? All she said was 'I think you should go tell theâ€'" and you were gone." Zekk interrupted.

Tenel Ka gave Zekk a look like "and what did you want me to do? Stand there when I knew what he would say? We didn't have time to discuss this with the committee," then continued with her idea: "Although Jedi Tionne did not suggest this, I believe it would be good if we went to Coruscant and tried to find out for certain who it was and what happened."

"Good idea!" Jacen leapt to his feet, "let's go!"

"Uhâ€|Friend Jacen, I believe you may want your boots and lightsaber, at least, first."

"Jacen looked down at his empty belt and bare feet as if he'd never seen them before. "Oh. Right. Hey, and I should feed my pets too."

> "Yeah," Jaina said, "I need my boots and stuff too, but I don't have to feed anything. Go take care of 'em, Jacen. We'll prep the ship after we get our stuff." Jaina glanced at her friends for confirmation and then raced off to finish dressing, the others right on her heels. <p>

Less than ten minutes later, after the faster packing job and ship-prepping the young Jedi Knights had ever completed, the Hapean cruiser \_Rock Dragon\_ lifted off right in front of sleepy, surprised Jedi Trainees, en route to Coruscant.

\*\*

## CHAPTER SEVEN

\*\*

Tenel Ka sat in the back of the \_Rock Dragon\_, rebraiding her red hair in the traditional style worn by Dathomirian warriors. Zekk stooped to get under the low bulkhead then leaned down to talk to her.

"Tenel Ka," he whispered.

"Yes, Friend Zekk?"

"Ssh!" He looked around to see if the twins or Lowbacca were nearby then continued, "when are you going to tell them about Anakin?"

Tenel Ka looked uncomfortable. "I do not knowâ€¦I did not want to worry them any more than they already wereâ€¦"

"Well, I know I said I wanted you to tell them, but if you don't do it soonâ€¦Please tell them. I don't want too, either!"

\* \* \*

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\_Why does hyperspace look so colorful when it's really nothingâ€¦\_ Jacen Solo wondered absentmindedly as he stared out the viewports. Frankly, he didn't care what hyperspace looked like, or why, but anything that took his mind offâ€¦\_it\_â€¦was welcome, now. He was so far lost in his melancholy reverie, in fact, that the gently touch of a hand on his arm and a whisper in his ear made him jump.

"Tenel Ka," said Jacen, "hiâ€¦" he saw the expression on her face, "what's wrong?" he asked.

"Jacen, my friendâ€¦" she hesitated, "I have to tell you something else, too. It isâ€¦not good."

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\_Uh-oh\_, Jacen thought, \_it has to be pretty bad, consideringâ€¦\_"What?"

"Yourâ€¦brother, Anakinâ€¦heâ€¦nor your fatherâ€¦can be found..."

"Why don't they just call dad on the comm? If he's in the \_Falcon\_, they can get him on the ship, can't they?"

"Theyâ€¦can call the ship, butâ€¦nobody has answered the comm for â€¦very, \_very\_ long time and Coruscant is getting extremely worried about your father's silenceâ€¦and your brother, they know for certain, is not with him."

> "How do they know that?"<p>

"Becauseâ€¦he was on Yavin IV when your father leftâ€¦"

"He \_was\_? But how come we didn't know about this?" Jacen inquired in disbelief.

"I believe that the other Jedi students were instructed not to inform you, or us, because ofâ€¦what transpired."

"Huh? What happened that was such a big deal?"

Again, Tenel Ka hesitated, before replying. "Iâ€¦do not \_know\_. I was not there at the time, either."

> Jacen could sense that she wasn't telling the truthâ€¦"at least not the whole truthâ€¦"and he'd caught the indicative emphasis on one wordâ€¦"<em>know<em>"â€¦but he decided not to press her. If Tenel Ka thought he ought to know, she would have told him.

"Alrightâ€¦I sure hope they find them soonâ€¦maybe we could look for

them after we see what happened on Coruscantâ€|Why do bad things always happen at the same time?"

"That, my friend, I do not knowâ€|"

\* \* \*

"Smeggin' Kest-spawned Sith!" rang out over the comm. It was immediately followed by other, just as colorful and twice as ugly-sounding, comments that could have made a Hutt blushâ€|except that Han had heard at least half of them \_from \_Hutts.

The object of Han's attentions replied just as colorfully and just as originally.

"Don't you know how to smeggin fly, you cross-bred \_fftebb\_ little fnarling bastâ€""

"Who you calling a lousy flyer, you moth-eaten worm-spitted slimeball son of aâ€""

"Who the Sith do you think you smeggin are, anyway? Han Solo?"

"Actually, snot-face, I am."

"Yeah, and I'm a Hutt Princess."

"Well, how about that? I didn't know there was such a thing as Huttese royalty."

Han's comment was followed quickly by another spout of foul language.

"I'll show \_you\_ who can fly, you little garbage-bag of aâ€""

"Sure," Han sneered, "you're on. I'll beat you with oneâ€|Sith, I'll beat you without a smeggin co-pilot in a YT-1300!"

"Wanna \_bet\_?"

> "Fine. Fifty?"<br> "You're on!"

\* \* \*

Mara Jade-Skywalker hadn't thought things could get all that worse. Han wasn't talking, Chewie was \_Sith\_ knows-where, and the rest to the galaxy seemed to be conspiring against them as wellâ€|Especially this blasted mud-hole of a planet, \_Dagobah\_! "Sithspawned insects!" Mara slapped her hands in the air in front of her, trying to shoo away the small vermin.

"Relax, Mara. They're only bugsâ€|They won't hurt you."

"Shut-up, Skywalker. Just because \_you\_ can project Force-shields that keeps bugs away doesn't mean that \_I \_can!"

"Mara, Maraâ€|what a \_mood\_ you're inâ€|Watch that tempâ€|ERRRRRRRR!" Luke suddenly slips and falls to the swampy ground as Mara throws a clump of mud at her husband's face. "Hey! What was \_that\_



for?"

"\_That\_ was for the bug shieldâ€|but \_this\_ is for the 'temper' I have." Mara scoops up another handful of mud and tosses it at the Jedi Master's face.

"Hey! Maraâ€|" Luke gives up and grabs a handful of mud himself and, with careful aim, lets it fly directly at his wifeâ€"

â€|but his footing was too slippery, and instead the Jedi Master ended up landing face-first in the murky, muddy swamp of Dagobah.

\* \* \*

"Smegâ€|" muttered Jaina Solo, as she wiped an oily hand across her forehead, pushing her hair out of her eyes. She looked so much like a female version of her father, Han Solo, that it would be impossible not to know that they were related.

That relation was something Zekk wasn't always too happy aboutâ€|especially when he saw how beautiful she wasâ€|and remembered what her father would do to him if he ever touched her. \_She is so beautifulâ€|it almost hurtsâ€|and to think she might like \_me \_as much as \_I \_like herâ€|\_ It still amazed Zekk whenever he thought about it. To think, I girl like her with a guy like himâ€|

And now he had to tell her that her father and brother couldn't be foundâ€|might be captives, might be \_dead\_â€| \_Kestâ€|why does someone like that have to suffer so much? And then there's meâ€|\_I \_made her suffer even moreâ€|\_ It hurt Zekk so badly he wished he could die when he thought of all the pain he'd caused herâ€|and she \_still\_ loved himâ€|It just blew him away, the wonder of herâ€|

"Oh! Hi Zekkâ€|I hate power de-fuelersâ€|What's up?"

"Um, wellâ€|not muchâ€|uhâ€|"

> Jaina immediately knew something was wrong. Something <em>big</em>.

"What?" she asked sharply, "What's wrong?"

"Uh, Jainaâ€|I have to tell you somethingâ€|"

"What?" The way she looked at himâ€|so trustingâ€|so naiveâ€|she didn't have any idea what he had to tell herâ€|it just about broke his heart to think he had to give her any more pain.

"Zekk, what \_is \_itâ€|It's really bad, isn't it? Tell me, Zekk. It's okay, just tell me."

"Oh Jainaâ€|" his voice cracked with emotion, "Jainaâ€|Iâ€|I love youâ€|"

"I know, Zekk. Why is that so bad?" Jaina looked so innocent, so beautifulâ€|it made his heart ache.

Zekk leaned down and took her face in his hands. "Jaina Solo, you are absolutely stunning. I love you so muchâ€|"

"I love you, too Zekk. Iâ€|"

Zekk completely forgot all about lost people and dead Wookiees and

every other painful fact the galaxy threw at them as they kissed. He knew he had to tell her, then.

And he would. Later.

—

\_Much\_ laterâ€|

End  
file.